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and the Univocity of Being**

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Introduction

The goal of this paper is to come to an understanding Leontius' of Byzantium's programmatic attempt to harmonize Trinitarian and Christological terminology. Helpful for this endeavor will be the passage in Leontius' work on your handout, where he gives an argument for the consistency of the terms of *ousia* and *hypostasis* in Christological and Trinitarian thought (*oikonomia and theologia*; PG 86/2, 1921B-1924B). The questions this paper would like to address are: Does Leontius have some sort of ontology that underlies his use of the term *ousia* and what would it look like according to the passage we will investigate? Answering these questions will allow us to catch a glimpse of how human and divine natures relate, how Christ manifests God in Leontius' theology and what his ontology implies for the transcendence of God. To this end, we have to first give a short and sharply reduced account of Leontius' concept of *ousia*. In a second step this concept has to be illustrated with the help of Leontius' anthropology, which he constructs from Trinitarian Theology as well as Christology, leading to certain tensions in his system that Leontius is keen on mediating. In a third step we will analyze the passage on your handout illustrating Leontius' attempt at a mediation.

Remarks on Leontius' usage of *ousia*

Generally speaking, Leontius' fundamental concern was to hold the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* apart, in order to solve the problem of unity and difference in Christ befalling Theologians in his time. This ranks him among the strict Chalcedonians. In a famous passage from the beginning of his treatise against the Nestorians and the Eutychians, Leontius uses the term *enypostatos* to further qualify the *ousiai* of Christ.¹ Researchers have long debated the meaning of this term in Leontius. Roughly speaking we can say that there are two meanings possible: either *enypostatos* means something like "really existent" or "truly real", as it has been used in traditional Trinitarian thought for the person of the Son; or Leontius of Byzantium is one of the first if not the first thinker who expressed the idea of an insubsistence of the natures of Christ in his *hypostasis* by the term *enypostatos*, a usage that so called Neo-Chalcedonian authors like Leontius of Jerusalem and Maximus the Confessor, who were intent of harmonizing Chalcedon with Cyril of Alexandria's Christology, have later on developed more fully.

At any rate, in the passage of *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* (CNE) he calls the *ousia* a *pragma hyfestws*, a subsistent, a real thing. It seems that he is expressing the same thing with the term *enypostatos*. By opposing *ousia* and accidents, which only have being *in* another thing, whereas the *ousia* has being in itself and can theoretically be considered in itself, Leontius emphasizes the reality of the *ousia*. Furthermore, as Benjamin Gleede has remarked, textual evidence from his *Epilysis*² shows that Leontius did not fully adhere to the so called Neo-Chalcedonian school of thought that taught a certain kind of insubsistence of Christ's human nature in the Logos.³ Leontius seems to think that the Neo-Chalcedonians consider the *hypostasis* of the Logos as in some way affected due to the assumption of a human nature: In

¹ Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, PG 86/2, 1277C-1280A.

² Id., *Epilysis*, PG 86/2, 1944C.

³ Benjamin Gleede, *The Development of the Term ἐνυπόστατος from Origen to John of Damascus* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), 61.

that view, he says, a *hypostasis* is *made* out of two natures.⁴ Leontius of Jerusalem and Maximus the Confessor would call this a composite *hypostasis*.

For the Byzantine Leontius, this sort of Neo-Chalcedonian insubistence affords the *ousia* with too little, almost accidental reality as it receives its being from the *hypostasis*. Contrarily, he emphasizes that the human *ousia* of Christ is a real, existent thing in the first place. Of course, this is first and foremost a point against the so-called Eutychians or rather the Severian Monophysites, who argue that the human *ousia* of Christ is dissolved into a unity with his divine *ousia*.

Addressing the Nestorians, Leontius makes the point that, even though the human *ousia* is real and exists as a fixed unity, it never subsists *by itself* as a particular, which it only does in the *hypostasis*. In conclusion of this section we can tentatively say that for Leontius an *ousia* does have a certain ontological reality which is not just theoretical, but at the same time it exists together with or in a *hypostasis*. Now we will see how he applies this thinking concretely in his anthropology.

Anthropology

Given the fixity and complete unity of what Leontius denotes by the term “*ousia*”, scholarship has clearly perceived the tensions befalling Leontius’ anthropology.⁵ Constructing the human being as an analogy to the hypostatic union in Christ, Leontius differentiates very clearly between the two complete substances (*ousiai*) of body and soul, as in Christ’s person the divine and the human natures are real and complete. His monophysite opponents strongly criticized this sort of analogy, since it would force the theologian to speak of three natures or *ousiai* in Christ: body, soul and divinity.

Leontius is thus challenged to argue for the unity of the human being while at the same time asserting that body and soul are somehow fixed and complete substances in themselves. His first attempt at an answer to the Monophysites is to simply apply again the Christological model of the hypostatic union to the unity of body and soul in the human person. Since the two substances are united in one *hypostasis*, the human being is *factually* always one. This argument, however, does not touch on Leontius’ anthropological presuppositions that still necessitate speaking of three natures in Christ. Consequently, Leontius is forced to argue for the unity of body and soul with the term *one ousia*.

In CNE 1289D-1292C we read his answer:

Leontius starts with a general logical principle: Particulars (*hypostaseis*) participate in general notions (*ousiai*) while general notions are predicated of particulars. Then, Leontius defines the term “one (human) nature” as a general notion: the whole human species, meaning the entire collection of all future and past particular humans – a collective universal. To make this clearer, we could structure Leontius’ argument as follows:

Premise 1: “One human nature” can be defined as the single whole of the human species.

Premise 2: The whole of the human species is a collective universal comprising all human beings, future and past.

Premise 3: Any common reality or term can be predicated of its individual instances.

⁴ *Epil.*, 1944C.

⁵ See the papers on Leontius by Marcel Richard.

Premise 4: The particular human being is an instance of the whole of the common human nature.

Premise 5: The whole is fully in its parts.

Conclusion: The “one human nature” as a collective universal can be predicated of any particular human being.

The subtleness of the argument lies in the change of the definition of the term *ousia* from expressing the ontological unity of body and soul to denoting the unity of the entire human species, just as Gregory of Nyssa did in his *Ad Ablabium* for the divine nature and the human nature.⁶ This does not change the fact that, on the level of the particular human being, the term *ousia* is used by Leontius to denote body and soul as two distinct *ousiai*. This manifests clearly the problems that Platonist anthropology poses for an integration of Christology and Trinitarian Theology. Leontius’ solution does not quite satisfy, due to the ambivalence of the term *ousia* he has to burden his system with.

Concluding this second section we could say that Leontius’ anthropology proves to be fluid. According to the exigencies of the debate, he constructs the human being either through a Christological lens or from a Trinitarian viewpoint, not quite arriving at a consistent meaning for the term *ousia*. Perhaps we can see better that Leontius uses the fluctuation of the term *ousia* in his Anthropology as a terminological hinge between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, and it is not quite clear whether this is a result of his fluctuation between Logic and Ontology.

Univocity of Being? 1921B-1924B

The question we have to address in the third section of this paper is: How did Leontius try to arrive at a consistent view of the term *ousia* after all? It seems he wrote his *Epilysis* after he he was pressed on the issue by a Severian interlocutor who seemed versed in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Contra Eunomium*. The interlocutor asks

“Akephalos: Granted, in Trinitarian Theology the *hypostasis* and the *ousia* or nature are not the same. However, in Christology they are identical with each other. For if, according to the divine Gregory, the novelty of the mystery [of the Incarnation] renewed the natures, I think it will also renew the appellations, so that according to him the principle and the definitions of each will fit with the others.”

If we draw the out the implications of that statement, the Severian seems to say that having a Christology and an Anthropology consistent with each other is argumentatively much more convincing than positing a unified terminology for *theologia* and *oikonomia* at the cost of a fluid meaning of the term *ousia* in anthropology. In his response, Leontius interestingly avoids the use of his fluid anthropology and argues very differently for the consistency of the term *ousia* in the whole of theology:

“*Orthodoxos*: Does this not surpass I don’t know which excess of folly? For the definitions of things are predicated univocally of things of the same genus as well as of things belonging to the same species, as people prove who are versed in these matters. Since everything that shares in the term *ousia* will also share in the

⁶ See the work of Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa. Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Leiden: Brill, 200).

definition of it, even if the differences of *ousiai* are countless. When defining *ousia* simply, we should say that it denotes the existence of something. For we say that God and angel and human being and living thing and plant exist as an *ousia*, and the concept of the *ousia* is commonly assigned to all, as it shows the existence of these things, not what they are or how they exist, which the proper definitions of each thing manifest. The categories show that this is the case; they are predicated univocally of subordinated genera.

[Also, Genera as well as specific differences are predicated of species and individuals. Things take part equally in *ousia* and in being a living thing, which can be embodied as well as bodiless, rational as well as a-rational, sensible and intelligible, and [they do not share] in one more and the other less, but equally and commonly and, in short, as part of their definition.

In demonstrative treatises, the circular proof has also been falsified in another way. For it acts similar to someone who propounds an argument, and then puts forth himself as a witness of this said argument, and urges that it is credible since he himself has said so.]

Accordingly, if the proofs in the Fathers concerning the life-giving and holy Trinity and concerning the great plan of the God-Logos, one of the Trinity, did not come forth and are not advanced now from the general principles and definitions of the *ousia* and the *hypostasis*, or the person and the nature, then any treatise will be absurd and not demonstrative. For someone should give a reason, why *hypostasis* and *ousia*, or nature and person define and indicate the common and the proper [aspects] in Trinitarian Theology, but that this would not be fitting to be the case in Christology.

For saying that, due to the newness of the mystery these concepts are defined differently in Trinitarian Theology and differently in Christology is first of all an action of ignorant people, because the most mysterious of all mysteries is God himself, who is hidden together with the Seraphim, and to whom, as the great Gregory said, such mysteries refer. Every act of speaking should rightfully be silent about him and every intellectual movement should seize, as it has arrived at what is beyond word and intellect.

But the manifest mystery of the hidden realities of God is more manifest than the hidden mysteries in such a degree, as what is beyond nature has entered into what is visible in nature. Now, is only the definition of the *hypostasis* and the *ousia* renewed in the Incarnation, or also every [other] utterance and every name and speech? And what absurdity, if only their definition is renewed and not also the definitions of all the others as well? However, at any rate this does not possess any ground in reality and therefore makes no sense, as the Great Basil said.”

After reading this long passage we cannot go into all the details but we will summarily say that Leontius opposes univocity and equivocity. He accuses his opponents of adhering to a pure equivocity of terms in Christology and Trinitarian Theology by separating the terms from their definitions. Thus, equivocity negates the true manifestation of the divine in the manifest mystery of Christ. Naturally, for Leontius as well as for the Severian interlocutor, God in himself is hidden and beyond word, intellect and nature. However, for Leontius this God has truly revealed himself in Christ and thus we must speak in univocal terms of the

Trinity and Christ. He achieves the univocity of God and the world by subsuming all beings (God, angels, human beings etc.) under one single definition of existence as such, which *ousia* stands for when defined simply.

In this respect, Leontius falls short of Ps-Dionysius' strong language for the transcendence of God as beyond *ousia* or being, even though he knows his writings and quotes him even by name.⁷ Leontius seems to make a bit of a desperate move here and puts all beings and God under the same category of existence as such. In this, Leontius even found a successor in Duns Scotus, who also holds a univocal concept of being, ens, for God and the world. A few questions are in order to point to the problems of Leontius' view: Is the transcendence of God not corrupted if he is put in the same genus of existence as the world? Does not the world then somehow share in God's uncreated and eternal being, as both share the same sort of existence? This would remind us of the Origenist doctrine of the fall of beings from some sort of unity with God. Can Leontius' univocal use of the term *ousia* still fully affirm the distinction of the created and the uncreated existence, which was so important for example to Athanasius as well as Ps-Dionysius and in turn, Maximus the Confessor? Part of an answer to these questions has to be given by an analysis of the relation between predicative logic and ontology in Leontius which I cannot serve with here. At any rate, we have a sense now for the task of later authors so diverse as John Philoponus and Maximus the Confessor to reject Ps-Dionysius or integrate him into a Theology that holds together both transcendence and true manifestation of God without falling into the simple alternative between univocity and equivocity. Maximus, in my view, will come forward with a solution that resembles more Aquinas' analogy of being than Duns Scotus' univocity of being.

⁷ See e. g. CNE, 1284C; 1288C; 1304D-1305A.